

The Skills That Separate Good Physicians from Great Leaders

Introduction by Arthur C. Lee, MD

Featuring Anahita Dua, MD, Lorenzo Azzalini, MD, Alexander G. Truesdell, MD, Amir Lotfi, MD, and Adnan Chhatriwalla, MD.

Finishing fellowship marks a major transition in a physician's career. You're no longer the trainee — you're the one others look to for guidance, leadership, and expertise. This shift is exciting, but it also comes with a new level of responsibility. No one is going to hand you opportunities to lead, teach, or present — now, your growth is on you.

Early-career physicians need more than clinical expertise to advance in their careers. Self-awareness, curiosity, and active listening are just as crucial for making a lasting impact. What does it take to grow in these areas? In interviews for FastWave Medical, we asked a few seasoned physicians for their insights. Here's what they had to say.

Stop Waiting For Permission: Embrace Your Expertise as a New Physician

Dr. Anahita Dua is a vascular surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital specializing in advanced endovascular and limb salvage techniques. A leading expert in vascular surgery, she has published 200+ peer-reviewed papers, authored five textbooks, and pioneered research in peripheral artery disease.

For those newly trained, Dr. Dua emphasizes the importance of owning your expertise. "You are at a place now where what you have to say is worthy," she says. The shift from trainee to independent physician isn't just about clinical expertise — it's also about stepping into your professional identity. With new responsibilities comes the need for self-advocacy. While mentors and senior colleagues can offer guidance, advancing your career is ultimately up to you.

Opportunities to give talks, participate in industry training, or take on leadership roles won't always come with an invitation. Instead of waiting for someone to recognize your potential, Dr. Dua advises taking the initiative. For example, let industry representatives know

you enjoy leading trainings and are interested in joining key opinion leader groups. Starting conversations and demonstrating interest are how you gain visibility.

The opportunity to deliver podium presentations and speaking engagements are professional growth tools, and it's up to you to leverage them. "If you're waiting for permission, [or] if you're hesitating because of imposter syndrome ... throw all of that in the trash. There's no time for that," Dr. Dua warns. "If you're not stepping up to take that podium, someone else will. So you might as well be the one in that position."

EQ Matters: Understanding Yourself to Grow as a Physician

Dr. Lorenzo Azzalini is a leader and mentor in interventional cardiology. As the Director of Interventional Cardiology Research and an Associate Professor of Medicine at the University of Washington, his expertise in complex percutaneous coronary interventions (PCI) has earned him international recognition. He has over 290 peer-reviewed publications and multiple prestigious awards.

For Dr. Azzalini, technical expertise is only one part of being a physician. "Emotional intelligence is the building block, from teamwork to conflict resolution," he explains.

Dr. Azzalini highlights self-awareness as a key factor in developing this important skill set. Recognizing both strengths and limitations is essential for growth. "It's important to know one's self and one's limitations to be able to work on those and mitigate our weaknesses," he says. That applies not only to practicing physicians but also to how they train others.

[Don't miss hearing from **Drs. Truesdell, Lotfi, and Chhatriwalla!** Continue reading online via the QR code above.]

Continue reading Lee et al online, with more from Drs. Truesdell, Lotfi, and Chhatriwalla:



Arthur Lee, MD

Arthur Lee, MD is an interventional cardiologist and Director of Peripheral Vascular Services at The Cardiac & Vascular Institute (TCAVI) in Gainesville, Florida.

He completed medical training and residency at Mount Sinai in New York City, and then completed his Fellowship at Beth Israel Medical Center.

Dr. Lee holds board certifications in interventional cardiology and cardiovascular diseases. His areas of clinical interest include preventive cardiology, interventional cardiology, peripheral vascular disease, and chronic limb-threatening ischemia.

Disclosure: Dr. Arthur Lee is a consultant to FastWave Medical.

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A great mentor doesn't take a one-size-fits-all approach. Dr. Azzalini stresses the importance of adapting to different learning styles. Some trainees are visual learners, while others need detailed, logical explanations. Some benefit most from hands-on demonstrations. "We need to understand how to get through to them to leave a positive and lasting impact," he notes.

Make a Difference By Cultivating Your Curiosity (and Then Executing With the Right Team)

Dr. Alexander G. Truesdell is an interventional cardiologist and cardiac intensive care physician at Virginia Heart and Inova Schar Heart and Vascular in Northern Virginia. Specializing in complex coronary interventions, cardiogenic shock, and mechanical circulatory support, he has built a career around tackling the toughest cases in cardiovascular medicine.

For early-career physicians, one of the most valuable skills is asking questions that can lead to improvements big and small. Research doesn't have to mean basic science or lab work — it can be as practical as identifying ways to improve patient care. "A lot of my research is just quality assurance, quality improvement," Dr. Truesdell explains. "It starts with a simple question: How can we do this better?"

That mindset led to his renowned work in cardiogenic shock. Rather than launching a massive research initiative, he and his colleagues started with a straightforward inquiry: How can we improve outcomes for these critically ill patients? That question led to collaboration, innovation, and ultimately, the development of key programs in mechanical circulatory support and shock management.

Beyond clinical expertise, Dr. Truesdell emphasizes the importance of leadership and teamwork. A combat veteran, his military career spanned Infantry, Intelligence, and Special Operations units across multiple continents, including deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

This background instilled in him a direct, high-intensity leadership style, one that required some adjustment in the medical

world. "I had to retrain myself," he admits. "The soft skills are important. It's not just about having the right idea; it's about getting things done."

Executing ideas successfully often comes down to assembling the right team. Whether building a shock program, implementing intracoronary imaging, or advancing high-risk PCI, success depends on working with people who complement your strengths. "It doesn't matter if you're right if you can't get it done," he says.

For physicians looking to establish themselves, the path starts with curiosity. Find what interests you, ask questions, and seek out like-minded colleagues. Progress follows naturally from there. "Most people would be pleasantly surprised to find out just how far a simple question can take them," Dr. Truesdell says.

Don't Overlook the Human Side of Medicine

Dr. Amir Lotfi, the chief of the cardiovascular division at Baystate Health and professor of medicine at UMass Chan Medical School-Baystate, knows that technical expertise alone doesn't make a great physician. He has dedicated his career to research on acute myocardial infarction, stem cell therapy, and hypertensive emergencies.

When it comes to training the next generation of physicians, his focus goes beyond clinical skills to prioritize the human side of medicine.

One of the most important lessons he teaches is active listening. "You're not just listening to someone to give them a reply," he explains. "You actually need to see what they're saying." Whether in patient care, mentorship, or team work, real understanding comes from fully engaging with others.

Beyond active listening, Dr. Lotfi stresses another critical quality for physicians: striking the right balance between confidence and humility. Confidence is essential for making decisions and leading in high-pressure environments, but without humility, it can lead to arrogance. Humility keeps physicians open to learning and self-improvement. "If you don't have the humility part, then you

have arrogance, and you're going in the wrong direction in your decision-making," he warns.

This balance is crucial at every stage of a medical career. Whether you're newly out of fellowship or have decades of experience, there's always more to learn. The best physicians, Amir believes, combine confidence with self-awareness, empathy with decisiveness, and expertise with the willingness to grow.

Leadership is a Learnable Skill

Dr. Adnan Chhatriwalla is an interventional cardiologist with expertise in coronary and structural interventions, the Medical Director of Structural Intervention and Director of Interventional Research at Saint Luke's Mid America Heart Institute.

For Dr. Chhatriwalla, one of the biggest challenges in medicine is driving change. Whether it's implementing new risk models, adapting to electronic medical records, or improving procedural techniques, resistance is inevitable.

To build his leadership abilities, Dr. Chhatriwalla pursued training opportunities, including courses from the Henry W. Bloch School of Management at UMKC. "Understanding your triggers, learning how to cool a situation down, and knowing how to influence people — it takes work," he says. He's seen younger physicians make the mistake of reacting too quickly, whether by firing off an emotional email or escalating conflicts unnecessarily. It's easy to recognize in others, but much harder to catch in yourself.

For him, honing emotional intelligence has been key. One of his best leadership lessons? Do not send that angry email. "Maybe write the words down, put it in your outbox, and take another look at it later," he advises. "Or run it by someone else before you do." Having the right idea counts, but delivering it effectively is what will drive impact.

Leadership isn't handed to you. It is a skill you build. Seek out resources, learn from experience, and refine your approach over time. ■